**THIRTIETH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR**

**23rd October 2022**

**Reading I: Ecclesiasticus 35:12-14, 16-19**

The book is also known as Sirach, is a Jewish work of ethics, from between 200 and 175 BC in Jerusalem. The opening sentences from our extract mean that the Lord is not influenced by someone’s rank or wealth or race. This idea originated with Moses in the desert (Deuteronomy 10;17-18) The Israelites had been strangers in Egypt, and God had treated them well so they felt obliged to treat strangers well. It was picked up by Peter (Acts 10;34-35) in regard to the acceptance of Gentiles by the Jewish Church.

This tolerance was rare in the ancient world and Israel’s ethical code was relatively enlightened. In the section immediately prior to this, Ben Sirach discusses human generosity; this leads him to treat of the generosity of God to humanity.

In a corrupt society where money brings power, and where injustice can be smoothed over by bribery, the poor man's situation is pretty hopeless. If we add a prejudiced inequality of the sexes, the poor woman is in even worse straits.

Without financial backing and social influence the poor cannot get legal redress when they are wronged and so are often forced to accept unfair treatment from the powerful. But God is a just judge: he shows no partiality for the rich or the powerful or for those in high places.

The 'poor of Yahweh,' the ANAWIM (the term includes a broad spectrum of suppressed persons: widows, orphans, captives, the destitute, the sick), is a familiar theme in the prophets. Towards these God assumes the role of protector, defender, their guarantee of justice. Ben Sirach continues in this prophetic line of thought when he says: 'He will not ignore the supplication of the orphan, or the widow when she pours out her complaint' (35:17).

**Responsorial Psalm**

I do not know what translation the Missal uses for this psalm, but in the Jerusalem Bible, it may be found at 32;2-3, 17-19, 23. It is one of the wisdom psalms. Peter takes up this psalm as a commentary on the qualities of the good life as it should be lived by the newly baptized. (1 Peter 3;10-12)

**Reading II: 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18**

This reading is the conclusion of the readings from 2 Timothy. Like the reading for the twenty-eighth Sunday of the year, it is part of the farewell letter of Paul to Timothy.

Paul has apparently been before the court before. It went favourably for him, but, as he poignantly laments, "there was not a single witness to support me. Every one of them deserted me” It seems as if none of the members of the Church in Rome was willing to speak publicly in his defence, maybe from fear of being arrested themselves. Yet Paul anticipated only death for himself.

In this passage, Paul mentions nothing about any hope of release that he does in his former imprisonments. Despite the gloomy prospects, however, Paul is full of ultimate confidence: "Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness."

**Gospel: Luke 18:9-14**

Eschatology is the study of everything concerned with the ‘last days’ – judgement, death, heaven, etc. Due to the delayed return of the Lord, these topics became more developed in the Churches thinking and many parables were related as if they had an eschatological significance. This would not have been so when they were first heard.

This story gives an example. The disciples are meant to pray, not like the Pharisee, but like the tax collector. (Tax Collectors were notorious extortionists, using the Roman military system for enforcement) Such stories teach religious and moral lessons but they have no direct relation to eschatological ideas.

If, however, we allow that Jesus understood himself to be not only the announcer of the inbreaking of God's kingdom but also the spokesman of divine wisdom (see above), then such parables as these fall naturally into their place as part of his teaching.

The Pharisee was quite right in performing his religious and moral duties. He spoke the truth. He was not like other people—extortioners, unjust, adulterers. Clearly, Jesus' hearers would say of the Pharisee that he was a righteous man.

The tax collector, on the other hand, had nothing in his favour. He was no better than the rest of his kind. There was no question but that he was the "bad guy." Yet Jesus pronounced him to be the "good guy." It is difficult for us to appreciate just how impossible this idea would have seemed to his audience. Try to imagine a child trafficker or a drug dealer or a fraudster held up as a virtuous model.

Jesus did not mean that the Pharisee was wrong in his deeds of morality and piety, or that the tax collector was right in being a swindler and extortioner.

What was wrong about the Pharisee was his approach to God: he prayed with himself; he set before God all his merits, compared himself with the tax collector, and said with Little Jack Horner, "What a good boy am I!"—thereby undermining all his goodness with one blow. He came before God trusting in his own genuine righteousness. The tax collector, on the other hand, knew that he was a bad lot. He would not lift up his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and cried, "Kyrie, eleison!" He was accepted by God because he threw himself on God's mercy.

So often the Pharisee of this parable has been called a hypocrite. It is an error which clouds the pathos of the parable and blunts its impact. The sad fact is that the man is sincere and his claims are true. He is scrupulously honest, a faithful family man, a meticulous observer of the Law (as the tax-collector is not). The Law enjoined only one fast a year (on the Day of Atonement) but he, a pious Pharisee, fasted twice a week.

And, far beyond the demands of the Law, he gave tithes of all his possessions. He is sincerely convinced that he stands right with God. After all, he has done what he ought to do, and more. He can truly thank God that he is not like other men. The snag is that his 'prayer' is not prayer at all. That is why it is not heard.

It is this sort of person and this attitude Paul has in mind in his letters to the Galatians and the Romans. He had seen with clarity (for he was also a Pharisee) that one for whom the heart of religion is observance may feel that one can earn salvation. What one must obey and what one must avoid are clear. If one is faithful, then a just God cannot but justify one. Such an attitude forgets the fact that salvation is gift. That is why the Pharisee could not recognise God's gracious gift in Jesus. But because the 'sinner' had no such illusion he could instinctively see the gift for what it was. There is nothing surprising in the fact that Jesus was a 'friend of tax-collectors and sinners' nor that this became a scandal to the respectable.

There is a wry point to the story about the good lady who, after a Sunday morning homily on our parable, was heard to remark: 'Thank God I am not like that Pharisee'!

For Luke, prayer is not an optional exercise in piety, carried out to demonstrate one's relationship with God. It is that relationship. The way one prays reveals that relationship. If the disciples do not 'cry out day and night' to the Lord, then they in fact do not have faith, for that is what faith does. Similarly, if prayer is self-assertion before God, then it cannot be answered by God's gift of righteousness; possession and gift cancel each other out.